

Report

Muir Woods National Monument

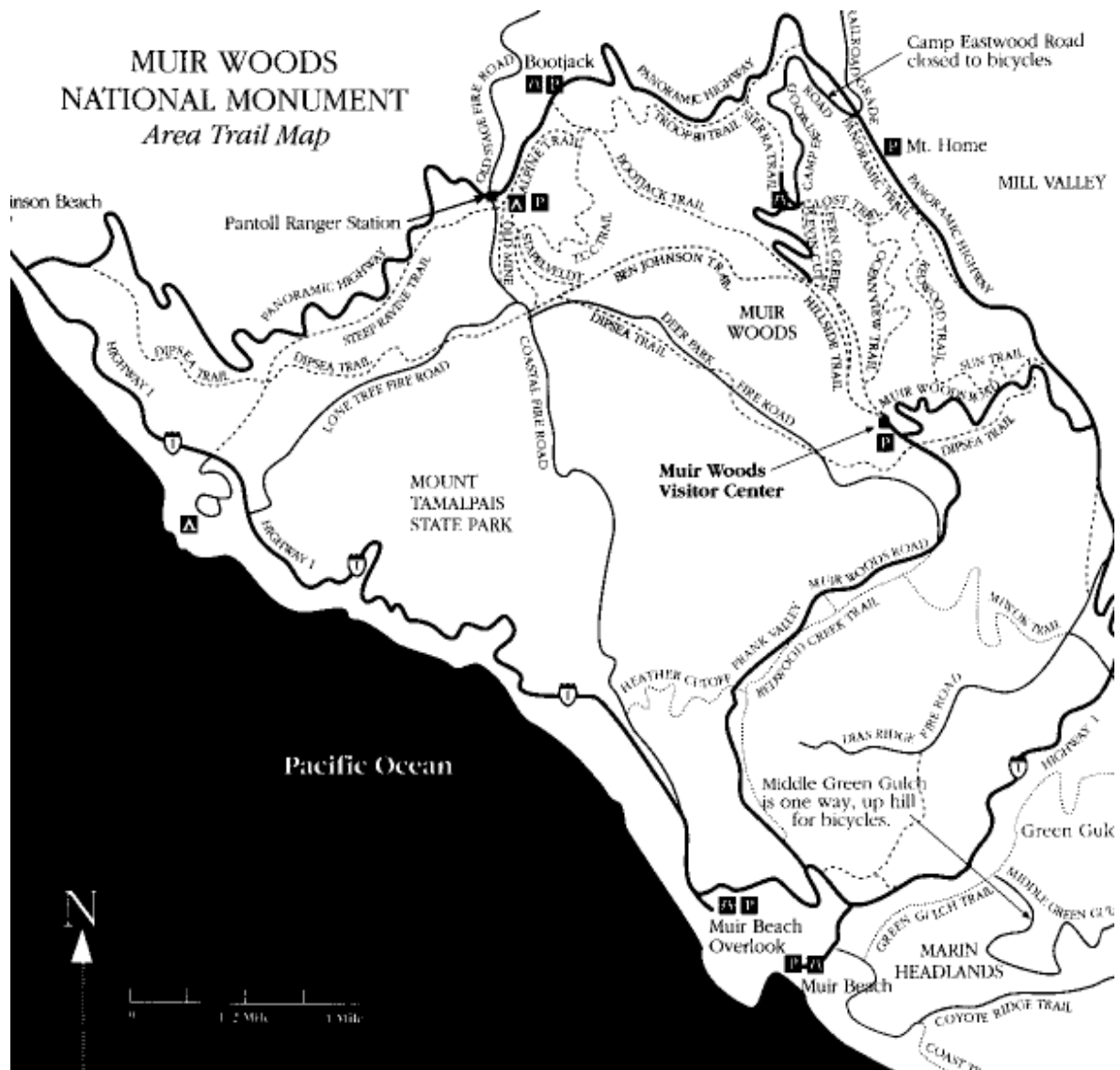
■ 1.0 Site Description



The Muir Woods National Monument (the Monument) was established in 1908 and included within the boundaries of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) in 1972. It is part of the NPS and located in Marin County, California, about 12 miles north of San Francisco. Major access to the site is by U.S. 101 and Highway 1. Access roads to the Monument (Muir Woods Road and Camp Eastwood Road) are steep and winding (see Figure 1). Large buses and vehicles over 35 feet long are prohibited.

The Monument consists of approximately 560 acres with the following main sites (see Figure 1):

- **Redwood Creek and Trails** – Redwood Creek runs through Muir Woods and is an important spawning ground for threatened steel trout and Coho salmon. The bridges along Redwood Creek make short walks possible. The short-paved portion of the Redwood Canyon Loop Walk is a major attraction for visitors. Other unpaved trails leading out of the canyon connect with 60 miles of trails in the Mount Tamalpais State Park.
- **The Bohemian and Cathedral Groves** – The largest old-growth redwoods in the San Francisco Bay Area and the tallest redwood trees in the world (*Sequoia sempervirens*) are located in these areas.

Figure 1. Location of the Muir Woods National Monument

- **The Muir Woods Visitor Center** – A Visitor Center and bookstore is located at the main entrance to the Monument. It is operated by the Golden Gate National Parks Association. The Visitor Center is staffed by volunteers and rangers. There are exhibits and interpretive programs that offer reference and educational information on the local ecology, as well as numerous works on the life of John Muir.

The Park charges an entrance fee of \$2.00 for adults over 17 years of age. Visitation has averaged approximately 1.5 million visitors per year. However, since the implementation of entrance fees, 800,000 to 900,000 persons visit the site annually. Visitation is highest during summer months, with an average daily attendance of 8,000 to 10,000 visitors. Visitation is lowest in the winter months and on weekdays. For 1997 and 1998, monthly visitation ranged from a high of 124,000 in August 1997 to a low of 26,000 in February 1998. The NPS has found that weekend visitation has consistently outnumbered weekday visitation by a factor of over two to one.

Muir Woods is visited by regional, national, and international visitors. The majority of domestic visitors are from California and the San Francisco Bay Area, and most international visitors are from the United Kingdom, Germany, and Canada. Its close proximity to major tourist attractions in the Bay Area makes the Monument a popular destination. Tour buses frequently transport visitors from San Francisco to the Monument.

The Park's Fee Programs Office has also estimated that approximately one-half of tour bus visitors arrive with pre-paid entrance tickets. A 1998 visitor survey also found that over half (56 percent) of the patrons were visiting Muir Woods for the first time. Furthermore, slightly over half of the visitors interviewed used rental cars from hotels or motels originating from San Francisco.

The average stay at Muir Woods was one to two hours. The same survey found that over 80 percent of visitors also went to other attractions nearby (Muir Beach, Stinson Beach, Sausalito, and the wine country) and indicated a need for "packaged transportation services" to different popular attractions.

Some transportation and traffic issues include the lack of adequate parking, the lack of adequate public transit access to the Monument, and traffic congestion on roads leading into the Monument. Currently, public parking at Muir Woods is very limited. The three parking areas fill up quickly during weekends and periodically during the summer peak season. A 1998 parking survey revealed that approximately 200 cars were parked along Muir Woods Road (in both directions) on an average weekday. Parking for tour buses is also very limited.

The seven-mile access roads leading into the Monument from U.S. 101 (on Highway 1, portions of Panoramic Highway, and Muir Woods Road) are congested. According to the Marin County Department of Public Works, many southern and western Marin County residents have expressed concerns about increased congestion on roadways leading into the area as a result of recreational traffic.

■ 2.0 Existing ATS

There are no existing Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) and direct public transit service to the Monument. However, the surrounding areas adjacent to the Park are served by Golden Gate Transit ferries and buses, the Tiburon Ferry, and the San Francisco Municipal Railroad (MUNI). The closest bus route to the Muir Woods entrance is Golden Gate Transit #63. The bus stops at the intersection of Panoramic Highway and Muir Woods Road, approximately two miles from the entrance to the Park. However, the location of the stop is not very practical for visitors. There is a two-mile walk along a narrow and winding road down to the Park entrance. Furthermore, service is too sparse and limited to make it convenient. Route #63 runs only on Sundays, with headways of one to two hours. It carries an average of 120 passengers per day.

Several tour bus companies bring visitors to the Monument. Currently, approximately 49 tour bus companies have a permit to serve Muir Woods, and about half of which are based

in San Francisco. The remainder come primarily from other cities in the San Francisco Bay Area. Some large companies operate up to 20 tours per day, while the smaller companies operate a few tours per week. Tour bus parking has been identified as a problem by the tour bus operators as highlighted in a 1998 Muir Woods Transportation Study.

■ 3.0 ATS Needs

There will be the potential to implement some form of ATS at the Monument. The 1998 Muir Woods Transportation Study recommended development of a multi-phased implementation plan that would include a free weekend shuttle service from the Manzanita park-and-ride lot near U.S. 101 to Muir Woods and Muir Beach. The shuttle service would operate during the peak season from April through October when visitation is highest. Service would be contracted to a local transit operator with an estimated annual operating cost of \$200,000. The proposed service would be managed jointly by the NPS and Marin County. Possible funding sources include the GGNRA, FTA Section 18 Rural Fee Demonstration Funds, and Marin County General Fund revenues. Other short- and long-term recommendations from the study include:

Short-Term Recommendations

- Prohibit parking along Muir Woods Road;
- Implement paid parking at Muir Woods at \$8.00 per vehicle during the peak season and \$4.00 during the off-peak season;
- Implement a year-round reservation system for parking at Muir Woods;
- Extend shuttle service to the Sausalito Ferry Terminal; and
- Expand overflow parking at the Manzanita park-and-ride lot to the Shoreline lot.

Long-Term Recommendations

- Implement expanded year-round free shuttle service;
- Construct a parking facility to accommodate parking demand for southern Marin and Muir Woods visitors; and
- Initiate a study to eliminate or significantly reduce parking at Muir Woods in the future.

The planning, funding, and management of all these programs are expected to be a joint partnership between the NPS, Marin County, and the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans).

■ 4.0 Basis of ATS Needs

There is a need for a new and effective ATS to better serve the Monument. Currently, there is no direct public transit access to the Monument, and the current parking capacity cannot handle the volume of visitors arriving in private automobiles without further damaging the natural environment. The narrow and winding access road (Muir Woods Road) together with increased recreational trips to different destinations in Marin and Sonoma Counties have contributed to local traffic congestion.

The primary objective of an ATS would be to alleviate congestion at Tam Junction, U.S. 101, Highway 1, and Muir Woods Road. This objective also would include reducing the demand for parking onsite. A 1990 visitor survey revealed that a majority (61 percent) of visitors preferred a shuttle system to Muir Woods during periods of heavy visitation. The survey indicates that there may be a public mandate for implementing some form of ATS to serve the Monument. Furthermore, an effective ATS may also be implemented to connect other recreational destinations such as Muir Beach, Mount Tamalpais State Park, and Stinson Beach, to form a regional ATS that serves multi-destination trips.

■ 5.0 Bibliography

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■ 6.0 Persons Interviewed

Michael Savidge, Golden Gate National Recreation Area, National Park Service

Nancy Horner, Park Planner, Golden Gate National Recreation Area, National Park Service

Mia Monroe, Ranger, Muir Woods National Monument

Art Brook, Transportation Engineer, Department of Public Works, County of Marin